

Message Text

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R 130610Z JUL 76

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4045

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0540

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJECT: EVENTS IN ERITREA: DETAILS, SHOOTOUT AND DEFECTION

REF: ASMARA 0535 (DTG 090550Z JUL 76)

1. FURTHER DETAILS HAVE BECOME AVAILABLE ON THE KILLING OF THE ETHIOPIAN OFFICER ON THE AFTERNOON OF JULY 7 (REFTEL). THE VICTIM WAS A MAJOR ZELEALEM, SECOND-IN-COMMAND OF THE DREADED "JOINT COMMAND" WHICH OPERATES FROM THE PALACE IN ASMARA. THIS UNIT IS INFAMOUS FOR ITS ROLE IN THE REPRISALS AGAINST ASMARA RESIDENTS FOLLOWING THE ASSASSINATION OF THOSE WORKING WITH THE EPMG AND FOR OTHER ACTS OF POLITICAL REPRESSION. AT ABOUT 1430 HOURS, FIVE MEN DRESSED IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES BROKE INTO THE LOALF DRESS FACTORY IN DOWNTOWN ASMARA, IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS MEMBERS OF THE ELF, AND DEMANDED MONEY AND CLOTHES. WITHIN A FEW MMINUTES, MAJOR ZELEALEM, AN UNIDENTIFIED CAPTAIN, AND AN ETHIOPIAN SOLDIER CAME
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INTO THE FACTORY AND WERE FIRED ON BY THE FIVE INSURGENTS.

THE MAJOR AND CAPTAIN WERE KILLED AND THE SOLDIER WOUNDED. AFTER THE INCIDENT THE ITALIAN MANAGER OF LIALF WAS ARRESTED ALONG WITH HIS ENTIRE OFFICE STAFF FOR COMPLICITY IN THE MURDER. AS THE MAJOR WAS REPORTED TO VISIT THE FACTORY ON A PERIODIC BASIS, STRAINS CREDIBILITY THAT THIS INCIDENT WAS SIMPLE COINCIDENCE; THE ASSASSINS WOULD SEEM TO HAVE BEEN CLEARLY AWARE THAT THE VICTIM WOULD BE VISITING THAT FACTORY AT THAT TIME.

2. IT IS REPORTED THAT ON JULY 10, THERE WAS A SHOOTOUT BETWEEN THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY AND NAVY IN MASSAWA. THE SHOOTING WAS REPORTEDLY SCATTERED AND CASUALTIES WERE LIGHT; HOWEVER, THIS INCIDENT IS REFLECTIVE OF THE CONTINUING FRICTION BETWEEN THE TWO BRANCHES OF THE EPMG ARMED FORCES WHICH HAS OCCURRED SPORADICALLY OVER THE LAST YEAR IN MASSAWA.

3. THE CONGEN HAS RECEIVED A REPORT THAT THE REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR OF TIGRE, COL. KALECRISTOS, DEFECTED TO THE TIGRE LIBERATION FRONT SOMETIME IN EARLY JULY. KALECRISTOS, FORMER POLICE COMMISSIONER IN ERITREA, IS A NATIVE OF TIGRE AND REPORTEDLY DEFECTED AS A RESULT OF THE DEPREDACTIONS OF THE PEASANT MARCHERS ON HIS REGION. REPORTEDLY HE STRONGLY OPPOSED THE NOW DEFUNCT CAMPAIGN ONLY TO HAVE HIS ADVICE IGNORED.

4. FOR ADDIS: CONGEN WOULD APPRECIATE ANY DETAIL EMBASSY CAN PROVIDE ON THE REPORT OF KALECRISTOS DEFECTION.
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